

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

OMB-01 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SAB-01 SSM-03

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 519

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 1714

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IS

SUBJECT: GOLDA MEIR RESUMES AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE LABOR PARTY

REF: TEL AVIV 1365

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE TWO WEEK OLD "ARMI CRISIS" ENDED MARCH 5 WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW LABOR PARTY STEERING FORUM INCLUDING FORMER PRIME MINISTER GOLDA MEIR AND GENERALLY OF "HAWKISH" COMPLEXION. WHILE MEIR IN NO SENSE IS MAKING A POLITICA COMEBACK, HER RETURN TO ACTIVE POLITICAL LIFE IS A GESTURE OF SUPPORT FOR RABIN WHICH SHOULD STRENGTHEN HIS STANDING WITHIN THE PARTY AND HELP TO REDUCE THE SNIPING AGAINST HIM. COMMENTATORS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED THE IRONY THAT THE RABIN TEAM, WHICH HAD CREATED HIGH EXPECTATIONS TWO YEARS AGO OF MAJOR CHANGES IN APPROACH AND POLICIES, NOW IS FORCED TO TURN BACK TO MEIR TO SOLVE ITS CURRENT PROBLEMS. IN THE MODERATE CAMP, THERE IS ALSO CONCERN THAT MEIR INFLUENCE WILL STRENGTHEN POSITION OF PARTY HARDLINERS OPPOSED TO

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WEST BANK WITHDRAWALS. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, MEIR RETURN IS

PROBABLY POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT WHICH MAY HELP TO RESTORE
MEASURE OF COHESION TO BADLY DIVIDED LABOR ALIGNMENT RANKS
IN PREPARATION FOR THE PARTY CONVENTIONS LATER THIS YEAR.
END SUMMARY

2. THE SEMBLANCE, IF NOT THE SUBSTANCE, OF RENEWED LABOR
PARTY COHESION WAS ATTAINED ON MARCH 5 WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT
THAT A NEW STEERING FORUM WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF FORMER
PRIME MINISTER GOLDA MEIR HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED TO PROVIDE AN
ACTIVE LINK BETWEEN THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT. SECRETARY
GENERAL MEIR ZARMI RETRACTED HIS TWO-WEEK OLD RESIGNATION,
DECLARING HIMSELF SATISFIED THAT RABIN HAD MET HIS MAIN DEMAND
FOR THE PARTY TO RESUME ITS TRADITIONAL ROLE AS A SIGNIFICANT
PARTNER IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. THE STEERING FORUM
WILL BRING TOGETHER THE PARTY'S LEADING REPRESENTATIVES
INCLUDING--IN ADDITION TO RABIN, MEIR AND ZARMI--MINISTERS
PERES, RABINOWITZ, ZADOK, AND GALILI TOGETHER WITH HISTADRUT
SECRETARY-GENERAL MESHEL AND JEWISH AGENCY CHAIRMAN ALMOGI.
ALL ARE HARDLINERS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ZADOK AND RABINOWITZ.

2. NOTABLY ABSENT FROM THE LIST ARE YIGAL ALLON AND, FROM
THE OLD GUARD, EBAN AND DAYAN. WHETHER OMISSION OF ALLON IS
INTENTIONAL IS NOT YET CLEAR, AND THE ANSWER PROBABLY
MUST AWAIT HIS RETURN FROM WASHINGTON. FOR NOW AHDUT
AVODAH IS REPRESENTED BY GALILI AND RAFI BY PERES.
THIS BALANCING ACT (ONE FOR ONE) ILLUSTRATES THE CONTIN-
UING GRIP OF FACTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS ON LABOR PARTY
INSTITUTIONS, EVEN THOSE CHARACTERIZED AS INFORMAL IN
NATURE, DESPITE THE STREAM OF STATEMENTS FROM VARIOUS
PARTY LEADERS INDICATING THAT THE FACTIONS ARE ON THEIR
WAY OUT.

3. MOST STRIKING FEATURE OF THE RESOLUTION OF THE
"ZARMI CRISIS" IS THAT THE RABIN TEAM HAS HAD TO TURN
TO THE ALMOST 78 YEAR OLD FORMER PRIME MINISTER TO
SOLVE ITS DIFFICULTIES. MEIR HAS ABSENTED HERSELF FROM
ACTIVE PARTY LIFE SINCE STEPPING DOWN FROM THE PRIME
MINISTERSHIP AND GIVING UP HER KNESSET SEAT IN JUNE
1974, ALTHOUGH SHE HAS MADE HER VIEWS KNOWN SINCE THEN
THROUGH OCCASIONAL INTERVIEWS AND PUBLIC APPEARANCES HERE AND
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ABROAD. HER RETURN FROM SEMI-RETIREMENT HAS INEVITABLY SPARKED
FRESH CONTROVERSY.

4. THOSE WHO SUPPORT THE MOVE NOTE THAT, AS ONE OF
THE LAST REMAINING LEADERS OF THE PRE-STATE GENERATION
AND AS ISRAEL'S MOST FAMOUS INTERNATIONAL PERSONALITY,
SHE HAS THE STATURE TO HEAD THE LABOR PARTY DIVISIONS
AND--IF SHE WANTS--TO PUSH IT TO TAKING HARD DECISIONS

IN THE FOREIGN POLICY ARENA. AS A STRONG ADVOCATE OF THE ALIGNMENT WITH MAPAM, MEIR MAY BE ABLE TO BRING RABIN TO MAKE THE NECESSARY POLITICAL GESTURES IN THAT DIRECTION. ON THE DEBIT SIDE, HOWEVER, IT IS NOTED THAT THE PARTY, WHICH IN 1974 HAD STRUGGLED TO ACHIEVE A MAJOR CHANGE IN PERSONALITIES AND APPROACH, NOW FINDS ITSELF COMPELLED TO TURN TO THE PERSON WHO --AS THE DOVES PUT IT-- WAS THE MAJOR ARCHITECT OF THE LARGELY DISCREDITED POLICIES OF THE PRE-1973 PERIOD. HER RETURN IS SEEN BY SOME OBSERVERS AS A BLOW FOR RABIN, AN OPEN ADMISSION THAT AFTER TWO YEARS HE HAS PROVEN UNABLE TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS THE LEADER OF THE PARTY. THERE IS CONCERN IN THE MODERATE CAMP THAT HER INFLUENCE WILL NOT ONLY CEMENT PARTY UNITY BUT ALSO STRENGTHEN THE HARDLINE POSITION AGAINST TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS-PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS THE WEST BANK.

5. IT IS TOO EARLY TO JUDGE HOW OR WHETHER THE STEERING FORUM WILL ACTUALLY WORK OR EXACTLY WHAT KIND OF INFLUENCE MEIR WILL NOW EXERCISE. LAST YEAR'S ILL-FATED EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A LEADERSHIP FORUM HAD FAILED IN PART BECAUSE RABIN NEVER REALLY ALLOWED IT TO GET OFF THE GROUND AND IN PART BECAUSE IT WAS TOO LARGE. NEW FORUM MAY PLAY GREATER ROLE, SINCE RABIN HAS BEEN FORCED TO AGREE TO THIS MOVE OR ELSE BE CONFRONTED BY AN INTERNAL REVOLT, AND NOW HAS TO SHOW SOME RESULTS. MOREOVER, THE SMALLER GROUP WILL BE MORE MANAGEABLE. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, HOWEVER, MUCH DEPENDS ON THE INTENTIONS OF THOSE DIRECTLY INVOLVED. IN CASE OF MEIR HEALTH FACTOR ALSO HAS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION. DESPITE HER REPUTATION AS AN INDOMITABLE PERSON OF VIRTUALLY BOUNDLESS PHYSICAL AND MENTAL RESOURCES, MEIR IN NO SENSE IS MAKING A FULL POLITICAL COMEBACK. AT THE
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CONVENTION, WHICH IS NOW DUE TO TAKE PLACE IN OCTOBER, THE PARTY WILL CONSIDER ITS FUTURE COURSE AS REGARDS ITS PLATFORM, ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP. THE LATEST ARRANGEMENTS SHOULD ENABLE RABIN TO FIND STRONGER BACKING IN THE PARTY BETWEEN NOW AND THEN.
TOON

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